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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000398

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SUBJECT: MFA GCC OFFICE DIRECTOR PREDICTS MORE ACTIVE  
REGIONAL ROLE FOR THE BODY, BUT NO STRONG SECURITY ROLE

REF: KUWAIT 397

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) During a February 5 meeting, the Ambassador and Abdullah Al-Ghanim, Director of the GCC Office at the Ministry of Affairs, discussed GCC involvement with Iran, counterterrorism, regional defense, and other issues affecting the Gulf states. Al-Ghanim said that Saudi King Abdullah has an "open mind" with regard to internal and external affairs and he predicted that under the new King, Saudi Arabia would become more active in GCC affairs. He was also confident that Kuwait's new Amir, Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, would help to energize the GCC.

¶2. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question about GCC counterterrorism efforts, Al-Ghanim said that GCC Interior Ministers had set up a counterterrorism "operations room" during their last meeting. He explained that this is a mechanism for regular contacts among GCC officials, and not a physical place. He also noted that central bankers have met on anti-money laundering issues. Al-Ghanim commented that the GCC was not putting much effort into building its regional defense capabilities, focusing instead on economic issues, such as trade with China, India, Pakistan and the EU.

¶3. (C) Al-Ghanim further expressed his disapproval of Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad. He said the Kuwaitis were very worried about the Iranian reactor at Bushehr, located only 120 kilometers away. Al-Ghanim mentioned that Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammad Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and the Omani Foreign Minister had met with the Iranian President to try to dissuade him from his confrontational course, but he provided no sense of a coordinated GCC plan to deal with Iran's nuclear program. Likewise, individual GCC countries carry out discussions with Iraq, but the GCC does not have a unified strategy.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Although a senior official at the MFA, Al-Ghanim was not very informative on GCC political dynamics or potential. (See reftel for a more interesting report of a conversation with former GCC Director General Abdullah Bishara.) We focused with Al-Ghanim on GCC potential to do more politically to counter Iran. His lack of response was not encouraging. We will try to explore further the potential for GCC involvement in the counterterrorism field. Much of the formal CT consultation takes place among Ministry of Interior officials of the member states, while national intelligence services operate in their own channels, and don't appear to cooperate in the GCC grouping.

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LeBaron